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President: Mr. Koonjul (Vice-President) ..... (Mauritius)

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In the absence of Ms. Rasi (Finland), Mr. Koonjul (Mauritius), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Social and human rights questions: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Introduction of draft decision E/2004/L.19

1. **Ms. Kusorgbor** (Ghana), speaking also on behalf of Romania, introduced draft decision E/2004/L.19. Her delegation sought the concurrence of Council members to recommend that the General Assembly, at its fifty-ninth session, decide to enlarge the membership of the Executive Committee of the Programme of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) from 66 to 68 States, to include Ghana and Romania, both of which met the requirements for membership. The enlargement of the Executive Committee would reflect the interest of Member States in the work of UNHCR and help it to address the growing problem of refugees in a common manner.

Regional cooperation (*continued*) (E/2004/15 and Add.1 and 2 and E/2004/16-20)

2. **Ms. Tallawy** (Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields (E/2004/15 and Add. 1 and 2), said that it not only updated the Council on the activities and needs of the regional commissions but also on their contributions to the United Nations development agenda and its central role in promoting international cooperation. The regional commissions built consensus through policy dialogue and therefore helped to articulate regional perspectives on such important international issues as sustainable development, financing for development and the implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. Their capacity should be more fully utilized, however, in line with Economic and Social Council resolution 1998/46, annex III.

3. The two addenda to the report contained resolutions and decisions emanating from the ministerial sessions of the commissions which were submitted for the Council's action or attention. The summaries of the economic and social surveys provided the necessary backdrop for considering development issues in various regions and their interrelationship with the global economy. For the first time, the five regional surveys had been part of the documentation for the high-level segment.

4. In view of the commissions' leading role in the regional follow-up of United Nations conferences and summits in economic and social areas, they had strengthened their cooperation with various United Nations entities and with regional organizations and civil society. Many of the regional meetings organized by the commissions to follow up on such conferences involved regional development banks and other regional institutions. The growing collaboration among the regional commissions involved many substantive areas such as information and communication technologies (ICT) and the regional dimension of globalization.

5. In that connection, the commissions' sessions had emphasized the need to strengthen the production sectors and regional integration processes as effective vehicles to enable countries to benefit from globalization. The Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) had published a flagship report on developments in globalization and regional integration in its member countries. The regional commissions had, in close cooperation with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), organized a round-table discussion on bilateralism and regionalism in the aftermath of Cancún at the eleventh session of UNCTAD held in June 2004.

6. The regional commissions had made serious efforts to respond to the guidance provided by the Council. Interactions between the Council and the commissions however, had not been entirely satisfactory. For instance, the Council's deliberations during the coordination, operational activities and high-level segments had hardly touched on the role and activities of the regional commissions. The regional commissions found it difficult to take part in the high-level segment for practical reasons. Because the regional commissions did not participate in the work of the General Assembly, it was all the more important that their annual one-day meeting with the Council shou'd be an occasion for dialogue. The Secretary-General's report contained recommendations that would ensure a more effective review by the Council of the regional commissions' activities within

the overall activities of the United Nations and build on the guidance provided by the Council in resolution 1996/46, annex II.

7. **Ms. Schmögnerová** (Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Europe) said that the commissions had indeed built consensus through policy dialogue and helped to articulate regional perspectives on many global issues. One such issue concerned the linkages between regionalism and multilateralism. Multilateral trade arrangements were generally understood to be preferable to regional ones. In the case of the Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) region, however, the high number of regional arrangements, including the European Union and the North American Free Trade Agreement, had played a positive role in its development. The European Union had developed many mutually beneficial bilateral agreements with non-members, particularly emerging market economies, including partnership and cooperation agreements with members of the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe and the South-East European Cooperation Process. Those agreements had greatly increased trade within the region.

8. The ECE region was heterogeneous, comprising founding members of the World Trade Organization (WTO), new members and States in early or advanced stages of negotiation with the body. Subregional and regional cooperation had helped States prepare for accession to WTO. In areas where there was insufficient cooperation, as in the case of Central Asia following the early accession of Kyrgyzstan to WTO, trade between the countries of the region had suffered.

9. There was a need for closer cooperation between the regional commissions and the Council and for greater linkages between the work of the commissions and the overall economic and social activities of the Organization. The Council should follow the recommendation contained in the Secretary-General's report to consider the regional cooperation item in a separate one-day segment, preferably to be held immediately following the high-level segment.

10. The commissions must have a leading role in the regional follow-up of global conferences and summits in the economic and social areas and in the regional implementation of the Millennium Development Goals. Member States sometimes narrowly interpreted the mandate of ECE, in contravention of Council resolution 1998/46, annex III, which recognized the dual role of the regional commissions.

11. **Mr. Kim Hak-su** (Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific) said that 2003 had been another good year for the region, characterized by strong gross domestic product (GDP) growth and low inflation. As a group, the developing countries in the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) region had grown faster than the global economy and faster than other groups of developing countries in 2003. Moreover, growth was becoming more autonomous and was being driven increasingly by forces within the region, such as intraregional trade and strong domestic demand.

12. The prospects for 2004 and beyond were positive, provided that the region did not experience any negative shocks in the coming months, and Governments continued to pursue a policy agenda centred on macroeconomic prudence, corporate and financial sector reform and enhancing competitiveness.

13. Despite the region's robust economic growth in recent years, poverty remained a significant challenge for many countries in the region. It was crucial to put in place well-designed strategies for poverty reduction that were more explicitly aligned with the Millennium Development Goals. The international community, for its part, must contribute wholeheartedly to such national efforts.

14. The Commission and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) were working together, drawing on the Programme's operational capacity and coordination role at the country level and the Commission's multidisciplinary analytical capacities and ability to hold regional intergovernmental meetings. The first phase of the UNDP-ESCAP project to support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in Asia and the Pacific had led into the first-ever regional Millennium Development Goals progress report 2003. The report presented a mixed picture of striking achievements in poverty reduction in some areas, on the one hand, and on the other hand, a lack of progress in some countries in eliminating hunger, providing universal primary education and lowering child mortality. The second phase of the project aimed to build upon the success of the first phase by broadening cooperation with the United Nations and other interested organizations and

creating synergies for initiatives related to the Millennium Development Goals.

15. The High-level Visionary Meeting for Asia and the Pacific 2020, at which key challenges facing the Asia and Pacific region had been identified, and the signing of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Asian Highway Network, which furthered regional integration and economic cooperation, had been among the highlights of the sixtieth session of the Commission, held in Shanghai in April 2004.

16. One of the secretariat's priorities was the regional implementation of the outcome of the World Summit on Sustainable Development, in particular the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation. The fifth ministerial conference on the environment and development in 2005 would guide the Commission in formulating an action-oriented regional strategy on the follow-up to the Summit. The Commission had also adopted implementation of the Monterrey Consensus in the Asia and Pacific region as the theme for its sixty-fourth session.

17. ESCAP remained committed to searching for new avenues and areas of cooperation together with its development partners. For example, it had signed a new, action-oriented Memorandum of Understanding with the Asian Development Bank in May 2004 to tap the comparative strengths of the two organizations.

18. **Mr. Machinea** (Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean), said that he would focus on key economic trends in Latin America and the Caribbean over the previous 12 months, the main activities of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) since July 2003, and the outcome of the thirtieth session of ECLAC.

19. Turning first to economic trends, he said that GDP was expected to grow by approximately 4 per cent in 2004, the highest rate since 1997 and an improvement over the 1.5 per cent growth of 2003. That performance had been driven by strong exports encouraged by buoyant international demand and high commodity prices. By contrast, domestic demand was not showing the same vigour, but was expected to recover during 2004. Gross fixed capital formation had remained flat in 2003, but the expansion of economic activity and greater use of installed capacity should favour investment in 2004. In 2003, the region-wide inflation figure had fallen 4 per cent over the previous year, and that trend was expected to continue in 2004, largely thanks to lower inflation in Brazil, which influenced the regional figure heavily. However, several countries had suffered inflationary pressure caused by rising international prices for food and fuel in particular.

20. Unemployment in the region remained high at 10.6 per cent. Relative to the recent historic highs, unemployment in Argentina, Uruguay and Venezuela had dropped; by contrast, the situation in Brazil, Mexico and some other countries was not improving. The level of real wages had recovered significantly only in Argentina; levels in Brazil, Uruguay and Venezuela had continued the downward trend of 2003.

21. High commodity prices and high volumes shipped had helped to produce record exports, although the situation was not uniformly good. Regional imports had continued the upward trend seen in 2003, largely reflecting high commodity prices and the cost of oil, since most of the countries of the region were net oil importers. Terms of trade for the region had improved under the influence of high commodity prices, but had been offset by high fuel prices.

22. The region had not had a current account surplus since 1953, but that pattern had been broken in 2003. The 2004 surplus was forecast to be about 1 per cent of GDP, helped by substantial foreign remittances. The regional surplus in trade in goods would reach even higher levels in 2004 than in 2003. Although capital inflows were projected to recover in 2004, the region was forecast to transfer US$ 22 billion abroad, bringing the cumulative outflow of resources for the period 1999-2004 to just under 6 per cent of GDP. However, foreign direct investment was expected to increase. Autonomous capital flows remained modest, but were an improvement over the large outflow of the previous year and enabled the countries of the region to obtain financing at an average cost of 9.6 per cent.

23. The economic policy goal of the region for 2004 had been to maintain the course set in 2003, focused on price stability, controlling inflation, containing the expansion of public debt and maintaining the primary fiscal surplus of central governments. Most countries had been gradually lifting restrictions on foreign-currency operations. The currencies of Argentina, Brazil and Chile had appreciated, while the opposite had occurred in Central America and Mexico.

24. Since July 2003 ECLAC had strengthened cooperation with its members by working towards more transparent management, further decentralization and greater accountability. It had simplified and modernized operations, eliminated overlap and ensured that budgetary and planning processes were results-driven. Alert to the effects of economic and social events on the political stability of fragile democracies in a number of countries, the Commission had lobbied for greater multilateral attention to be paid to the situation of the region within United Nations priorities, and for the Organization to have a consistent agenda in place for the region.

25. The Millennium Development Goals had become the navigation chart for the United Nations as a whole and, therefore, for ECLAC, which was working to develop methodologies to help States follow up the world summits on economic, social and environmental issues from a regional perspective and in the framework of the Millennium Declaration. The Commission applied an integrated approach to following up past summits and conferences which would be used for the forthcoming phase of the World Summit on the Information Society. The Commission was encouraging links between countries in the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus and the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation.

26. The Commission was encouraging interregional cooperation by working with the other regional commissions and maintaining contact with intergovernmental bodies that were not part of the United Nations system, such as the Inter-American Development Bank and the Organization of American States, and it was closely involved with sectoral intergovernmental forums on issues including agriculture, the environment, energy, housing and urban development.

27. The thirtieth session of ECLAC, held in Puerto Rico, had emphasized that Latin America and the Caribbean had invested heavily in their integration into the global economy and had been the most resolute of all developing regions in pursuing economic liberalization. The previous 15 years had brought greater stability, reduced fiscal deficits, increased exports and more foreign investment. However, growth rates and structural disparities must be improved.

28. Although the number of people living in poverty had been lower in late 2003 than in 1990, 44 per cent lived below the poverty line, and 20 per cent lived in extreme poverty. Social spending had increased, but its quality must be improved. The region must return to a rate of economic growth that made it possible to reduce unemployment and informal economic activity. The keynote document of the session had stressed that the idea of "more market and less State" must give way to the idea of "more market requires a better State".

29. **Mr. Amosko** (Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa) said that economic growth in Africa, while better than it had been in the 1990s, was still not high enough to enable the Millennium Development Goals to be achieved. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) was tracking progress towards the Goals and analysing issues to determine policies in specific areas.

30. The report on unlocking Africa's potential in the global economy (E/2004/17) had examined the continent's opportunities, recognizing that African countries could not obtain resources for development without being involved in the global economy. The Conference of Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development had focused on mainstreaming trade policies into national development strategies. In that connection, two major issues must be addressed. The first was poor trade facilitation. The Commission's analytical work would help African countries to argue effectively in discussions on the questions raised at the Doha Ministerial Conference of WTO, chiefly market access and agricultural subsidies. The second was the existence of severe domestic constraints. Unless African countries tackled problems including weak infrastructure and the lack of human capital, they would find effective integration into the world economy difficult.

31. Regional economic integration had been a long-held dream of African countries. With the arrival of the African Union and the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), that dream had come closer. A two-year study on such integration had just been completed. It had drawn the sobering conclusion that African countries' trade was mostly with countries outside the continent, with intra-African trade accounting for only 10 per cent of overall trade. Unless that proportion was increased, it was doubtful that Africa would achieve greater competitiveness in the world economy. Regional entities within Africa, especially the African Union, must work to develop strategies to overcome weaknesses.

32. Good governance was considered essential to pursuing the Millennium Development Goals, and was a centrepiece of the aims of ECA, the African Union and NEPAD. The first African governance report would shortly be published. It analysed political and economic governance trends in 28 African countries. The Secretary-General had established a Commission for HIV/AIDS and Governance in Africa which sought to make recommendations to address the enormous challenge of HIV/AIDS and analyse its implications for Africa's development prospects from the point of view of institutions, treatment, health care and so on.

33. Following eight years of reform, an external review of the work of ECA had been presented to the Conference of Ministers of Finance, Planning and Economic Development. They had endorsed its conclusions, confirmed that the Commission had become a significant voice for Africa, and pledged more resources through the trust funds being planned to support development for the continent.

34. **Ms. Tallawy** (Executive Secretary of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia) said that globalization and advances in information and communication technologies had made cooperation and integration among the States members of the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) vital. However, prospects for cooperation and integration had been seriously affected by instability and conflict, particularly in Palestine and Iraq. The region's economic growth was low or even stagnant because of a state of war that had lasted for five decades, leading to rampant unemployment, especially among the youth.

35. The economic situation made it doubtful that the Millennium Development Goal of halving the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015 would be achieved, since it depended on sustainable economic growth, but there was still some hope of achieving the oth . Millennium Development Goals.

36. Despite the difficult economic situation, the countries of the region had made great efforts, with the Commission's assistance, to apply to join WTO. ESCWA considered nevertheless that developing countries, including those in the Arab world, should have easier conditions of entry. Regional cooperation in trade, meanwhile, had been promoted by a number of agreements. They included the Greater Arab Free Trade Area (GAFTA) agreement, which was due to enter into force fully in 2005 and agreements proposed within the framework of the Arab Maghreb Union. The countries of the region had also signed bilateral agreements with the European Union and with the United States of America. There was continuing debate as to whether the obligations of those regional and bilateral agreements would be in harmony or in contradiction with each other.

37. The Commission had worked to improve cooperation and integration within the region through agreements on road, rail and maritime transport. One agreement had been in force since 2003, while the others were being negotiated. The Commission had also furthered cooperation within the region by preparing a common approach to the 2001 Doha Ministerial Conference and the 2003 Cancún Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization, the 10-year review of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (Beijing +10) and the 10-year review of the outcome of the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo +10), and by holding a forum on reconstruction needs in Palestine once peace returned.

38. **Ms. Bakker** (Observer for the Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the candidate countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Turkey), the stabilization and association process countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), and, in addition, Norway, said that, for the European Union, the Millennium Declaration constituted the overarching policy framework for the economic and social activities of the Organization, providing concrete and measurable targets to be achieved by 2015.

39. The regional commissions, working within their mandates, could make a useful contribution to reviewing progress on the implementation and follow-up of the outcomes of major United Nations summits and conferences and act as regional focal points for monitoring progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and other internationally agreed development goals and targets. The regional commissions should perform their functions in full cooperation and coordination with the global processes for monitoring the goals, so as to avoid duplication.

40. The European Union welcomed the efforts to strengthen coordination between the Regional

Commissions and other United Nations bodies, including the specialized agencies, funds and programmes. It was prepared to consider further proposals, such as discussing the work of the Regional Commissions during the coordination segment of ECOSOC. It reiterated its commitment to support the work and reform of ECE.

41. In the run-up to the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, the role of information and communication technologies (ICT) in fostering development had been more widely recognized. Such technologies could help to achieve the Millennium Development Goals in all areas of life. They were powerful tools for promoting good governance and empowerment, enhancing transparency and accountability in political systems and giving a voice to the poor. The European Union was aware of the digital divide, and so welcomed the Secretary-General's proposal to improve the mainstreaming of ICT into development efforts.

42. Information and communication technologies were being recognized as a long-term investment with a positive impact on development, but their effect in the short and medium term must be carefully measured to ensure that they achieved their expected outcomes. The United Nations could play a major role in data collection, benchmarking and debating e-strategies. In the context of efforts to give all States Members of the Organization a common approach to the information society, the European Union was ready to contribute to the work of the United Nations task force on financing mechanisms to bridge the digital divide and of the working group on Internet governance.

43. **Mr. Gerus** (Observer for Belarus) said that the regional commissions were an important mechanism for promoting multilateral cooperation at the regional level, which was crucial for achieving economic development and social progress and, in particular, the Millennium Development Goals. Reform of the commissions should be carried out carefully so as to avoid limiting their activities in areas important to Member States. The commissions must remain a key forum for exchange of experiences in human resources, capacity-building, ICT and other areas.

44. The commissions must have a more active role in bridging the digital divide through regional ICT initiatives as well as regional and subregional partnership programmes that enabled countries to exchange best practices in the development of an information society. The Economic Commission for Europe (ECE) should build on the work done during the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society in order to promote close and effective international and regional cooperation and the involvement of all countries, particularly developing countries and transition economies, in the area of ICT.

45. The enlargement of the European Union raised the question of what role ECE for Europe should play among European institutions. Any reform of the Commission should create favourable conditions to expand trade between members of the European Union and other European countries. It was also important to strengthen the role of the Commission in encouraging competition, economic growth and free trade in the region.

46. During the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, the Belarusian President had put forward an initiative to establish a trust fund under United Nations auspices to compensate software producers who exported their products to developing countries at reduced prices. His Government contributed to the development of regional cooperation, including in the area of ICT, and supported the preparation of regional and subregional electronic development programmes.

47. **Mr. Shin Kak-soo** (Republic of Korea) said that information and communication technologies (ICT) could play an important role in facilitating the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. In that connection, he welcomed the ongoing efforts of the regional commissions to address the slow progress in ICT development in some regions, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and small island States in the Pacific, and he reaffirmed the willingness of his Government to continue to provide developing countries with technical training and expert assistance in order to help them build ICT infrastructure.

48. As an integral part of the United Nations system in the economic and social spheres, the regional commissions must continue to strengthen the coordination of economic, social and environmental issues at the regional level. With a view to generating synergy and avoiding duplication of work, the regional commissions, supported by the Secretariat, should also collaborate with the United Nations funds and programmes and the specialized agencies.

49. As an active member of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), his Government welcomed the successful conclusion of its sixtieth session and the adoption of the Shanghai Declaration. The Shanghai meeting had confirmed that poverty reduction was a top priority and, in that connection, had recognized the vital importance of sustained economic growth and good governance. It had also concluded that regional cooperation could serve as an effective mechanism to ensure that the benefits of globalization were shared equitably. While it was encouraging that despite geopolitical uncertainties and the impact of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS), the developing economies of Asia and the Pacific had experienced strong, broad-based growth in 2003, poverty persisted in many countries due to the inequitable distribution of wealth. Pro-poor policies as well as economic growth were needed to reduce poverty and, in that regard, his Government was ready to share with other countries its experiences in the area of rural development and to that end had, in conjunction with ESCAP, launched the Rural Poverty Alleviation Programme.

50. Lastly, his Government was extremely concerned at the recent sharp increase in HIV/AIDS infection in Asia. As the 2003 SARS outbreak had shown, epidemics occurring in countries with poor health services could have serious economic consequences. ESCAP, in conjunction with other relevant international agencies, should therefore undertake further efforts to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS and to improve health services in the region.

51. **Mr. Zhang** Yishan (China) said that the most urgent task facing the international community was the pursuit of universal sustainable development. However, that goal could be attained only if the developing countries became less marginalized and were able to keep pace with globalization. For his delegation, Asia-Pacific cooperation was the natural choice to meet the new challenges posed by globalization. His Government took part in a number of regional cooperation mechanisms and, in 2002, had signed a free trade agreement within the framework of the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN). In addition, his Government was an active member of ESCAP and, in that connection, it welcomed the successful outcome of the Shanghai conference, in particular the broad-based consensus reflected in the Shanghai Declaration. He hoped that ESCAP would take advantage of the new vitality generated at Shanghai and would henceforth play a more prominent role in promoting Asia-Pacific cooperation.

52. **Ms. Mammadova** (Azerbaijan) said that one of her Government's foreign policy priorities was greater involvement in the global economy and participation in the regional integration process. It's willingness to pursue mutually beneficial cooperation had attracted a number of the world's leading companies to the Caspian region, and their projects would contribute to improving infrastructure and fostering regional economic growth. In addition, her delegation attached great importance to the development of cross-regional transport networks, since they offered the potential for expanded regional cooperation and created efficient transit corridors linking landlocked countries. However, much remained to be done and, in that connection, her Government would welcome technical and financial assistance from the international community.

53. The development of ICT was one of the key issues on her Government's development agenda. The level of ICT use was recognized as one of the main indicators of a country's intellectual and scientific potential as well as the transparency of its governance and, in the case of Azerbaijan, an adequate Human Assets Index, combined with the country's good economic performance, augured well for the development of that particular sector. Her Government had already adopted the National Information and Communication Technologies Strategy, which was now regarded as a best practice model for other countries.

54. Her delegation fully acknowledged the importance of the regional dimension in the promotion of an inclusive information society and therefore welcomed the Secretary-General's focus on the role of the regional commissions as regional focal points for monitoring and assessing progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. Also welcome was his emphasis on coordination between the commissions and country coordinators and the alignment of technical cooperation with the United Nations Development Assistance Framework and country-owned poverty reduction strategy papers. The commissions were important forums for the exchange of best practices in the areas of entrepreneurship, trade facilitation, ICT and the information society.

55. At the operational level, the regional commissions should support the diffusion of e-governance and contribute to the establishment of the unified State data transmission network. They should also consider taking action within the framework of the United Nations Special Programme for the Economies of Central Asia (SPECA) to incorporate ICT into transport systems. In that connection, further work was needed in the areas of harmonizing transit transport procedures and strengthening customs procedures in order to improve risk analysis. Her delegation welcomed the initiative taken by the Secretary-General to encourage SPECA member States to participate more actively in the Programme and stood ready to make its own contribution. It looked forward to the development of a regular mechanism for cooperation between SPECA member States which would take full advantage of their potential.

56. **Mr. Gallegos** (Ecuador) said that two major considerations should inform the management of regional cooperation. First, regional and subregional cooperation mechanisms had the potential to facilitate greatly the integration of developing countries into the global economy. Geographical proximity was an important factor in the multiplication and diversification of exchanges and the development of physical integration processes. Secondly, issues relating to development could be addressed more objectively at the regional and subregional levels than at the global level.

57. Accordingly, a number of general steps should be taken. In order to generate tailored responses to the specific situations of certain groups of countries, the regional commissions should increase their interaction with subregional bodies, since more detailed knowledge of particular needs would prevent the implementation of standardized solutions. Similarly, existing relations between the regional commissions and subregional bodies should be consolidated and strengthened. Subregional economic integration processes, particularly in Latin America, had the potential to expand to the regional level; thus, the regional commissions should support the creation of basic infrastructure to facilitate productivity, the adoption of measures to promote trade, and the progressive harmonization of health and quality standards.

58. Furthermore, functional relations between the regional arms of United Nations funds and programmes and the regional commissions should be further developed in order to ensure the optimum use of the substantive and operational capacity of the United Nations in each region. The regional commissions should also continue to play an active part in policy-making, so that the regional perspective would be more systematically reflected in the Organization's work.

59. **Mr. Fedorchenko** (Russian Federation) expressed the appreciation of his delegation for the report of the Secretary-General on regional cooperation in the economic, social and related fields (E/2004/15), and particularly for its analysis of ways to bridge the digital divide. His delegation believed that the regional commissions had an important role, within their mandates, in implementing the goals of major United Nations conferences and summits and in addressing development issues specific to their regions. Regular coordination meetings should continue to be held between the executive directors of the regional commissions to allow joint activities and exchanges of views.

60. The provision of technical assistance was a central component of the regional commissions' work. Such assistance should be coordinated at the regional and the subregional levels with the assistance provided by the funds and programmes, which could benefit from the regional commissions' experience. The work of the regional commissions and the United Nations ICT Task Force in establishing regional working groups and communications nodes was particularly important.

61. As a member of both ECE and ESCAP, his Government acknowledged the assistance with reform and integration into the world economy and the information society which countries with economies in transition had received from the two commissions. Individually, meanwhile, the two commissions faced new challenges. In the case of ECE, the challenge was to prevent new fault lines from appearing in Europe, by working with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. In the case of ESCAP, the challenge was greater cooperation in environmental and economic matters; his Government wished to see its Primorye and Far East regions become more fully involved in cooperation on matters including ICT, transport corridors and the use of natural resources. His delegation welcomed the importance attached at the sixtieth session of ESCAP, to multilateral approaches

to solving global problems and to the information society, an open and fair international trading system and achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

62. With regard to the proposal to devote a one-day meeting to regional cooperation, directly following the high-level segment of the Council, his delegation's views were mixed. Although such an approach would certainly make it easier for the executive secretaries of the regional commissions to take part in the high-level segment and would raise the profile of discussion of regional cooperation, there should be serious analysis of the proposal's "added value" and its effect on the other segments of the Council's session before altering what was a fairly effective pattern of organizing the Council's work.

63. **Mr. Rosenthal** (Guatemala) said the Economic and Social Council could derive even greater benefits from the work and collective wisdom of the five regional commissions, not least because their regional vantage point complemented the global vision that prevailed at Headquarters. In the not-so-distant past, cooperation and coordination between the regional commissions and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) of the Secretariat had been rather tenuous, but with the launch of the reform process in 1997, coordination mechanisms had improved considerably. Nevertheless, efforts to introduce greater coherence and cooperation between the Economic and Social Council and the five regional commissions had been less successful, due, in part, to the fact that dialogue with the executive secretaries had always been subject to time constraints and had left little room for interactive engagement.

64. Consequently, his delegation supported the Secretary-General's suggestion that the Council should decide that the regional cooperation item should be considered in a separate one-day segment of the Council, preferably to be held immediately following the high-level segment. Establishing a regional cooperation segment would have three advantages: First, it would recognize that the cross-cutting activities of the regional commissions were relevant to each of the existing segments and, secondly, it would raise the profile of the interaction between the Council and the five regional commissions. Thirdly, holding the regional cooperation segment immediately after the high-level segment would ensure that the five executive secretaries would be present at both.

65. **Mr. Onischenko** (Ukraine) said that his delegation supported the main results of the fifty-ninth session of ECE and welcomed its continuing focus on the reform process. Supporting the efforts undertaken by countries with economies in transition to integrate into the European economic area should become a priority of ECE activities.

66. Considering the significance of ICT in the context of socio-economic development, opportunities to access such technology must be made available to all those who had been unable to participate fully in a knowledge-based digital economy. Unfortunately, access to ICT had not been equitable: it varied greatly from country to country, between rural and urban areas and between the educated and the illiterate. In that connection, ECE could play a vital role in fostering regional cooperation designed to assist countries with economies in transition in their efforts in the areas of ICT and e-business development.

67. The "digital divide" was a reality in Europe, a region that included some of the most digitally advanced countries and countries with some of the lowest levels of ICT development. Therefore, ECE could and should play an active role in promoting the efficient use of ICT for development, in particular in the areas of trade facilitation and education; assisting governments to develop practical approaches for Internet governance and the financing of ICT for development; assessing the accessibility of ICT with a view to creating equal opportunities for the growth of the relevant sectors; and providing a forum for dialogue between various stakeholders with an interest in the development of the knowledge-based economy. Regional dialogue should contribute to national capacity-building and to the alignment of national strategies with global development goals.

68. His delegation also supported enhanced coordination between the Council and the regional commissions, including through regular exchanges of information and the holding of joint meetings on the issue of ICT for development. The Council had an important role to play in ensuring that the regional commissions delivered quality products to their constituencies in an effective and efficient manner. The second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society, to be held in Tunis in 2005, would be a key platform for the development of concrete measures designed to assist the international community to promote the more widespread distribution of the

benefits associated with the use of ICT for development. In that connection, his Government was committed to the Declaration of Principles and to the implementation of the Plan of Action of the first phase of the World Summit on the Information Society.

69. **Mr. Aman** (Indonesia) said that, the regional dimensions of the work of the United Nations had begun to receive greater attention. His Government continued to attach great importance to the strategic role of the regional commissions as facilitators of Member States' efforts to implement and follow up the outcomes of the major United Nations conferences and summits dealing with economic and social issues. In that context, the Council should concentrate on developing policies that could be transformed into concrete realities. Consequently, existing mechanisms for cooperation and coordination among the regional commissions and between the regional commissions and other regional organizations should be enhanced. The possibility of carrying out joint activities with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the Secretariat, UNDP and UNCTAD should also be further explored.

70. Member States' common efforts should be directed towards creating an enabling international environment and identifying possible ways of addressing the pressing and complex issues facing the regions, namely, poverty eradication, external debt relief, trade, financing for development, ICT for development and sustainable development. In that connection, and in line with the international community's firm commitment to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, the daunting task of poverty eradication should be given the highest priority. The regional commissions, particularly ESCAP, had a strategic role to play in that regard and could make a significant contribution to accelerating global development through the formulation of pro-poor policies and strategies.

71. His delegation supported the efforts undertaken by the regional commissions, particularly ESCAP, to work in partnership with the relevant stakeholders to establish specific programmes relating to ICT for development. It was to be hoped that such programmes would assist Member States to implement the Plan of Action of the World Summit on the Information Society. Given the huge disparities in the level of global ICT development, the regional commissions should give high priority to ICT infrastructure development. South-South cooperation was also important in that regard, although it should complement global action rather than attempting to replace it.

72. **Mr. Sunuga** (Japan) said that Member States must make every effort to cooperate with one another to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. In that regard, the regional commissions had a particular role to play in tackling the challenges and issues facing the regions in the run-up to the mid-term review of the Millennium Declaration. They had made a significant contribution to the preparatory process for the twelfth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development by leading regional implementation meetings and that practice should be emulated in other contexts.

73. The Economic and Social Council should be responsible for evaluating and coordinating the work of the regional commissions. Although he was unsure whether it was necessary to create a new segment within the Council's substantive session to review regional cooperation activities, the substantive session should be adapted to include such a review.

74. **Ms. Mehta** (India) said that she reiterated the statement she had made at the previous meeting (E/2004/SR.41).

Action on recommendations from regional commissions (E/2004/15/Add.1 and Add.2)

75. **The President** drew the Council's attention to documents E/2004/15/Add.1 and Add.2, containing eight recommendations from regional commissions requiring action by the Council. Since delegations needed more time to consider the recommendations contained in document E/2004/15/Add.2, which had been issued on the date of the current meeting, he suggested that action on those four draft resolutions should be postponed to a later meeting.

76. *It was so decided.*

77. **The President** invited the Council to consider the four draft proposals contained in document E/2004/15/Add.1.

Draft decision

78. *The draft decision was adopted.*

Draft resolutions I, II and III

79. *Draft resolutions I, II and III were adopted.*

Coordination, programme and other questions (*continued*)

(a) Reports of coordination bodies (*continued*) (E/2004/67)

(c) International cooperation in the field of informatics (*continued*) (E/2004/78)

(e) Mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system (*continued*) (E/2004/59 and E/2004/CRP.1-4)

(g) Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Task Force (*continued*) (E/2004/62)

(h) Tobacco or health (*continued*) (E/2004/55)

80. **Dr. Bettcher** (Coordinator, Framework Convention Team, Tobacco-Free Initiative, World Health Organization), introducing the report of the Secretary-General on the Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Task Force on Tobacco Control (E/2004/55), said that tobacco affected a large number of sectors, including health, finance, trade and the environment. The tobacco epidemic was reinforced through global marketing, trade liberalization and increased smuggling. Consequently, tobacco control would become effective only through collaboration among the different sectors of government and different intergovernmental agencies. The Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Task Force on Tobacco Control (the Task [illegible]e) was the platform where such collaboration c[illegible]e strengthened and explored in the most effective [illegible].

81. Tobacco consumption impeded development and increased poverty. The incidence of serious diseases imposed a heavy financial burden in terms of treatment costs and lost workdays, and poor households spent a significant proportion of their resources to maintain their addiction. Moreover, there was growing evidence that tobacco was used most commonly by the poor, creating a vicious circle. Forecasts from the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Bank indicated that the number of tobacco users was expected to increase to 1.46 billion by 2025, and production would move from the developed to the developing world in the next decade. It was therefore necessary to include tobacco control activities in programmes related to the Millennium Development Goals.

82. The necessary cooperation between WHO and other international organizations in reaching the objective of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control recognized the value of inter-agency collaboration on tobacco control. The treaty had been closed for signature on 29 June 2004 and would enter into force 90 days after the deposit of the fortieth instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval and accession.

83. States had acknowledged the valuable work of the Task Force, and it was likely that the Task Force would be called upon in the future by parties to the treaty, particularly developing countries and those with economies in transition, for technical and financial assistance with its implementation. Also, since the treaty was expected to enter into force soon, the Task Force would be called upon to contribute to the preparation of the technical document to be presented by WHO to the Conference of the Parties at its first session.

84. **Mr. Davidse** (Observer for the Netherlands), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the candidate countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania and Turkey), the stabilization and association process countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) and, in addition, Norway, said that his delegation welcomed the opportunity to discuss the United Nations Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB). The European Union was pleased with the improved report (E/2004/67), which demonstrated the complexity of the issues before CEB. The European Union appreciated the potential of CEB to meet those challenges and welcomed its efforts in support of NEPAD, conflict prevention and the fight against HIV/AIDS and transnational crime. CEB would have a crucial role in coordinating the implementation of the outcome of the triennial comprehensive policy review.

85. The report showed the important role that CEB was playing in following up United Nations summits and conferences in accordance with General Assembly resolution 57/270 B. The European Union welcomed the active engagement of CEB in coordinating the first

review of the implementation of the United Nations Millennium Declaration. It hoped to hear more about the ways in which CEB promoted enhanced coherence and coordination among the specialized agencies and other parts of the United Nations system. CEB was also the appropriate forum in which to focus on the implementation of the Monterrey Consensus of the International Conference on Financing for Development, the Plan of Implementation of the World Summit on Sustainable Development and various programmes of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

86. **Ms. Rotich-Matthews** (Kenya) said that her delegation would co-sponsor the draft resolution on tobacco or health. Tobacco was a serious threat to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and sustainable development. The Framework Convention, which her Government had signed and ratified, was a powerful tool and she looked forward to its entry into force.

87. **Ms. Velasco Osorio** (Observer for Mexico) expressed her delegation's support for the efforts of the Secretary-General to promote the mainstreaming of a gender perspective into all policies and programmes in the United Nations system. It was important now to concentrate on programmes where a gender perspective had been only partially included. Women should be represented in no less than 50 per cent of posts within the Organization, including as special representatives and special envoys. To that end, there should be more training programmes for women, and the Organization should commit more resources to such programmes.

88. At the national level, her Government believed that the active inclusion of women was a decisive factor in strengthening the democratic system and improving transparency mechanisms and accountability. Gender mainstreaming was a priority in technical cooperation, and there were many programmes linked to gender issues, including the rights of indigenous women, the prevention of cervical cancer, reproductive rights programmes and sexual rights. Moreover, many of her Government's external aid programmes were linked to gender issues.

89. **Mr. Shin** Boo-nam (Republic of Korea) noted with concern the indication in the second annual report of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) Task Force (E/2004/62) that the digital divide was shifting to sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and small island nations of the Pacific. Accordingly, the United Nations needed to devote more resources to addressing that issue and to focus ICT development efforts more closely on those regions. The ICT Task Force must continue to treat the question as a priority so as to prevent the new digital divide from widening. His Government particularly favoured greater incorporation of ICT into the rural infrastructure development and, in that regard, welcomed measures to increase per capita main lines and Internet access for people in rural areas.

90. The ICT Task Force was a multi-stakeholder body, a fact that might lead it to address more issues than it could realistically manage. It should concentrate on activities in which it had a record of success, including ICT policy and good governance and linking ICT with internationally agreed development goals. Furthermore, just as good governance was a prerequisite for development, sound Internet governance was essential to extending ICT throughout the developing world. The ICT Task Force should continue to promote Internet governance and contribute to the success of the second phase of the World Summit on the Information Society.

91. **Mr. Hannesson** (Observer for Iceland) noted that, in his country, the reduction of smoking through proactive measures was one of the most important public health projects ever undertaken. His Government had established ambitious measures through progressive legislation, such as a complete ban on direct and indirect tobacco advertising and the visibility of tobacco products at retail points. State support for measures against consumption included information campaigns in schools and anti-tobacco publicity. Statistics had shown such measures to be effective: tobacco sales had fallen by 42.5 per cent during the period from 1984 to 2001, and incidences of lung cancer had fallen steadily in recent years. Looking to the future, his Government had ratified the Framework Convention, and it intended to pass a bill banning smoking in restaurants.

92. **Mr. Talha** (Bangladesh) praised the members of the Ad Hoc Inter-Agency Task Force on Tobacco Control for their excellent work. Given the 5 million deaths worldwide every year from tobacco, WHO had embarked on a remarkable attempt to negotiate a convention on tobacco control.

93. The production of tobacco was as debilitating to health and prosperity as its consumption. Tobacco cultivation was not profitable, as small farmers had no access to international markets, and in local markets they were forced to sell their crop at unfavourable prices. Multinational corporations encouraged production to keep prices low and, to that end, offered loans to farmers who in turn were often unable to replay the loans because prices were too low. They thus found themselves trapped in a cycle of indebtedness that made it difficult to switch to alternative cash crops. Tobacco production was also dangerous to health.

94. His Government was proud to have been the first to sign the Framework Convention and the first government of a least developed country to ratify it. It encouraged other governments to accede to the treaty. Strong political commitment was necessary at all levels to respond to the challenge of the tobacco epidemic, and the Task Force needed maximum political support in its efforts to assist developing countries to implement the treaty.

The meeting rose at 6.10 p.m.